The Christian News-Letter

Edited by
J. H. OLDHAM

No. 11 JANUARY 10, 1940

DEAR MEMBER,

You may find this week's Supplement rather stiff, but I believe that it deserves your close attention for three reasons. First, it is by an acute American observer who was in Europe for some months last year, including the first few weeks of the war. Reinhold Niebuhr is a Professor in the Union Theological Seminary, New York. He visited this country to deliver the Gifford Lectures in Edinburgh. Secondly, the writer is one of the most vigorous of modern thinkers and his thought has had a wide influence, more particularly on the younger generation in this country. His two best-known books are *Moral Man and Immoral Society* (Scribners, 1933, 10s. 6d.) and *An Interpretation of Christian Ethics* (Harper, 1935, 6s.). Thirdly, what he writes about is of crucial importance for an understanding of the relation of Christianity to the problems of modern society.

FRUSTRATED YOUTH

The new world which Mr. H. G. Wells desires is in some respects very different from one that would satisfy Christians. But he often sees with great clearness, and expresses forcibly, what is wrong with existing society. In his latest book published last week, *The New World Order* (Secker and Warburg, 6s.), he focuses attention on a fundamental cause of world unrest, of which war is only one of the symptoms. It is the sea of dissatisfied, frustrated young people who can find no adequate outlet for their natural urges and ambitions.

It was undoubtedly this surplus of young men, for whom life in existing society had ceased to have any rational meaning, that fostered the growth of the Nazi movement. They were ready to join any party, to follow any leader, who beckoned them to a promised land and offered an adventure that gave immediate escape from present frustration. But the phenomenon is not confined to Germany; it exists in every country. These dammed up and balked energies are a force capable of disrupting every social order. The only means of averting an internal explosion is to find a satisfying life and rewarding employment for this mass of youth, which for the most part is without any real aim in life.

I do not doubt that Mr. Wells lays his finger here on the central problem of modern society. If there is to be any real future for our people and for mankind, the problem must be tackled with vastly greater imagination, determination, and energy than are at present in sight. The idea that to win the war will ensure the triumph of democratic ideals and allow us to fall quietly back into our ordinary way of life is a fatal blindness. The democracies themselves are threatened from within. The problems which will meet us when the war is over will be at least as difficult and testing as those of the war, and we must envisage them clearly now. The vital question

on which the future of civilisation depends is, How are these young people to find satisfying purpose in life?

The youth of the nation, as well as many older men, are serving in the arme forces. This fact affords a unique opportunity of ascertaining how they look at lif and religion and what is stirring in their minds. If any of you are able to suppl evidence about this, I shall be glad to hear from you. One of my younger colleague is devoting special attention to the subject.

BE VIGILANT: YOUR ADVERSARY THE DEVIL—

There is evidence in many quarters of a hardening of opinion against Germany This is only natural. But if Christianity means anything, it means salvation from wha is natural, and it offers this salvation not by the negative advice to restrain and purg our feelings (which is beyond our power) but by offering us a positive objectiv which gathers our whole emotional life into its service. The only thing that ca control passion is a more powerful passion.

If we are set on creating a just and free society that purpose can be relied on t regulate and educate our feelings. If it commands our whole being, our main concer will be to discover how the German people can be enabled to make their fulle contribution to its realisation.

The Bishop of Derby, in a recent letter to *The Times*, suggested the formation o a league or association of Christian people who would undertake the solemn obligatio to engage constantly and regularly in prayer throughout the whole war period, for th maintenance of a Christian temper and for the making of peace in accordance wit Christian principles. Let as many of us as possible take on ourselves this obligation bearing in mind that the answer to our prayers will be given not so much through a inward struggle with our lower selves as through a complete losing of ourselves i dedication to a positive task.

I have received from one of our members an anonymous type-written foolsca sheet in which the sole responsibility for the war is attributed to the Jews, and cowardly and vile attack made on them. Recipients of the sheet are asked to mak copies and send them to their friends, inviting them to do the same. Sinister propa ganda of this kind may not come under the notice of many of our members; but it does I have no doubt that they will do all in their power to denounce an counteract it.

THE SAPPING OF LIBERTIES

I have a letter from an Anglican priest working in the East End of London whic provides much food for thought about the ways in which liberty and independence ma be undermined without our realising what is happening until it is too late. He write as follows:—

"When the middle classes talk about freedom they tend to limit it to votin writing, speaking—things within their cognisance. When we talk about freedo we mean all these, of course, but the things that most concern us are other than thes for we are thinking in terms of people whose freedom is bound up with the fight fo the means of living at all.

"For instance, in regard to housing, the middle classes think in terms of fre contract between tenant and landlord. We know that the bargaining powers are no equal—that our people must live here, or they are not free to live. Their conceptio of freedom is our conception of bondage. Are we still free to-day in time of war

ontinue our fight? With regard to widows' pensions, are we still free to fight for their roper maintenance, or does war demand a political truce on the matter? With egard to A.R.P., are we free to make our desires known? In a great measure, freedom an be done away with in these things—not by passing any laws forbidding us to act, ut by making access to responsible people impossible, by making people consciously ss responsible beings by insisting they shall be impotent.

" It is in these ways that I believe we are losing our freedom to-day. The tendency or years has been to widen the distance between those who receive relief, and those sponsible for its administration, and to put the paid official in between as a barrier access. Step by step in London, we have gone, in my own day, from the Guardians the L.C.C., to Committee, to Sub-Committee, to the adjudicating system, and now, nce the war, the final removal of all direct access except through a monthly Court f Appeal.

" There are some of us who will never submit, and there are some successes that ome our way, but the ordinary person, potentially so powerful, is in fact more echanised than ever, and more consciously impotent. These tendencies mean so uch to people who ordinarily have so little power, and have to fight so hard to keep ive the consciousness of their being responsible people."

The issues raised by my correspondent are plainly of the highest importance for ie kind of society which, as Christians, we desire.

Yours sincerely,

J. H. Oldham

P.S.—We have not printed the names of our collaborators for some weeks, and ou may be glad to have the list again.

he Archbishop of York
he Rev. M. E. Aubrey
rofessor John Baillie
rofessor Ernest Barker
anon F. R. Barry
r. S. M. Berry
iss Margaret Bondfield
enry Brooke
he Rev. Henry Carter
ord David Cecil
he Bishop of Chichester
T. Christie
rofessor F. Clarke
r. J. Hutchison Cockburn
Canon F. A. Cockin
Dr. A. C. Craig
Sir Stafford Cripps
Sir Wyndham Deedes
The Rev. V. A. Demant
Professor C. H. Dodd
The Bishop of Durham
T. S. Eliot
Professor H. H. Farmer
Professor O. S. Franks
The Rev. W. D. L. Greer
Kurt Hahn
Viscount Hambleden
Sir Hector Hetherington
Professor H. A. Hodges
Miss Eleanora Iredale
Dr. H. Kraemer
Dr. A. D. Lindsay
Dr. George MacLeod
Professor Karl Mannheim
Basil Mathews
Principal N. Micklem
The Rev. T. R. Milford
Sir Walter Moberly
J. Middleton Murry
Professor Reinhold Niebuhr
Walter F. Oakeshott
Dr. James Parkes
Dr. William Paton
Miss Margaret Popham
Canon O. C. Quick
Dr. Charles Raven
Miss Dorothy L. Sayers
The Rev. Gilbert Shaw
The Bishop of Sheffield
Mrs. J. L. Stocks
Professor Norman Sykes
Professor Arnold Toynbee
Professor R. H. Tawney
The Rev. A. R. Vidler
President J. S. Whale
The Bishop of Winchester
Sir Alfred Zimmern

NOTES

British Colonial Policy. The following recent utterances on the subject of British Colonial Policy are important. Many readers will be glad to have them for reference. There are many situations in which practice falls far short of the stated aims. But these declarations lay down standards to which appeal can be made when concrete questions are under discussion.

The Prime Minister said in the House of Commons on November 28: "If Imperialism means the assertion of racial superiority, if it means the suppression of the political and economic freedom of other peoples, if it means the exploitation of the resources of other countries for the benefit of the Imperialist country, then I say that those are not characteristics of this country . . . In this country, whatever may have been the case in the past, we have no thought of treating the British Empire on the lines which I have described. For years now it has been the generally accepted dogma, not confined to any party in this House, that the administration of a Colonial Empire is a trust which is to be conducted primarily in the interests of the peoples in the countries concerned."

The Colonial Secretary said in the House of Commons on November 30: "If our relationship with the Colonial people is that of trustees, our policy in the Colonies must be based on two principles. In the first place, we must, as long as we are responsible, give them good government . . . We must, in the second place, be training the people of the Colonies for ultimate self-government, and that policy we are pursuing steadily, persistently and faithfully throughout the Colonial Empire . . . H.M. Government hold the view that it is a fundamental condition of a better Europe and of a better world that all peoples shall be free to live their own lives according to their particular means and traditions and genius, and provided that they do not interfere with the similar right which belongs to other peoples as well."

Prayer for Christian Unity. It is nearly a century since the Universal Week of Prayer, which is being observed this week (January 7 to 14) by Christians all over the world, was first organised by the World's Evangelical Alliance.

For about a quarter of a century the Octave from January 18 to 25 has also been obser as a week of prayer for the reunion of Chr endom by Roman Catholics, Orthodox, Protestants in many countries. A new to the observance of this Octave, apart fr any commitment to the doctrinal position those who originally promoted it, has this y been issued by the Superiors of Men's Religi Communities in the Church of England. call contains the following statement of w prayer for re-union should mean:

"'The Universal Prayer' can be actua by no proselytizing motive: by no des even unexpressed, for a 'denomination triumph or for the absorption of our fell Christians into a Unity fashioned according concepts drawn exclusively from the tradit of one or other of the divided communions Christendom. In this prayer we are to p for the reintegration of the members of Chri Body according to His Will. But equally principle underlying the prayer of the Oct forbids the effort to get rid of differences treating them as indifferent, or to snatch a reunion which would be insignificant superficial if it were attempted in the name a love that had escaped from the discipl of truth."

The Papal Encyclical. The Papal cyclical, which was the theme of a rec Supplement, has been published in excellent English translation by Mgr. Ron A. Knox under the title "Darkness over World" by the Catholic Truth Soci (38/40, Eccleston Square, London, S.W. price 2d. The Encyclical needs to be read a whole to receive an adequate impression the clear exposition of Christian principles their bearing on crucial contemporary iss and the deeply Christian spirit which perva the document.

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E CHRISTIAN
WS-LETTER
UARY 10th, 1940

The Supplement
No. 11

CHRISTIANITY AND POLITICAL JUSTICE

ear Dr. Oldham,

As a foreign observer of Britain's radually hardening determination to resist lazi aggression and of her final solemn solution to undergo the hardships of war or the purpose of bringing a new order in urope, I have been impressed by the bsence of any self-righteous pride and the egree of honest heart-searching which ccompanied the fateful decision of the ation. Many of my British friends, parcularly in Christian circles, though not only here, have expressed embarrassment that he same slogans are being used for this war s for the last one, and some have expressed oubt whether the future would justify them ny more than they seemed to be justified fter the last war.

HE NECESSITY OF MORAL UDGMENTS

I wonder whether sensitive spirits are not ctually in danger of abstaining from necesary moral judgments in the present situation ecause they discovered that the judgments n the last war were too simple. At that me we had too little understanding for the mbiguity of all human actions and decisons. This time we are in danger of llowing this inevitable ambiguity to disuade us from necessary moral judgments. he fact is that many of the judgments of 914-18 are more justified now than they ere then.

In the last war the charge of "German arbarism" was frequently made but there as no such evidence as the atrocities of he German concentration camps to subtantiate it. The specific charges in the ndictment frequently proved no more than hat war itself is cruel and that we are naturally more sensitive to the losses which the enemy inflicts upon us than those which we, with other weapons, inflict upon the enemy. (Arguments about the relative humaneness of a submarine campaign and a blockade are bound to be inconclusive because strategic considerations and defensive necessities determine the nature of the weapons which each side uses and colour the arguments by which they are justified.)

THE TYRANNY OF THE NAZI SYSTEM

All these ambiguities cannot change the fact that in this war the civilised world confronts the most highly elaborated tyranny which world history records. Whatever our moral scruples may be in regard to the historic decisions of past decades which drove the Germans to this madness, if it is not possible to define the Nazi system as tyranny, it is not possible to make any valid judgments in regard to right and wrong in history at all. Here is a system of government in which power has been made completely irresponsible and in which the hopes, fears, aspirations and common decencies of ordinary men have ceased to offer the slightest check upon the pride and ambition of rulers. The consequence is a tyranny which enslaves not only its own nation but every neighbouring nation which seems weak enough to invite its aggression.

Here is a system of morals which has made the dominion and aggrandizement of a race and nation the ultimate criterion of the good. What is good for Germany is unashamedly regarded as good in itself. Broken pledges, wanton aggression, cruel persecution, lying propaganda, everything is declared to be permissible if it serves the

advantage of a chosen nation. What is even more terrible is that this morality of imperialism is blended with a primitive religion in which another race, the Jews, are identified in its mythology with the principle of evil itself. Thus the last check upon human arrogance is destroyed and the unhappy race which is the victim of this mythology is robbed of even the most elementary and minimal human rights. To regard another race as by blood not only inferior but as morally evil is the ultimate limit in that perverse pride which infects all human life, but which a true religion manages to check and to hold in decent bounds.

When we now speak of German "barbarism" we are not thinking first of all of the inevitable cruelties which attend every war. We think rather of something which is worse than barbarism, namely that caricature of civilisation in which all the technical skills of an advanced civilisation have for years been harnessed to the one task of making a nation into a perfect instrument of military destruction and in which all the achievements of a universal culture have been debased to become the tools of political falsehoods. Tyrannies of other ages at least left the minds and hearts of the simple peasants innocent of hatred. But this tyranny has used highly efficient means of communication to carry its venom into every household and to fill the minds of a whole nation with phantasms.

THE DOUBLE PERSPECTIVE

In terms of the enemy which civilisation is called upon to oppose, history has never confronted decent men with a more sharply defined "evil." Yet it is right and important that they, and particularly Christians, should not discourage, but should entertain and cultivate, the moral and religious scruples with which so many men enter the conflict today. It is right particularly for Christians, for we have a faith which teaches us to regard all men as sinners in the sight of God. We should know that we are never "the righteous" who are called upon to fight the unrighteous. The injunction "Judge not that ye be not judged" does not cease to have validity for us even when we are called upon to make historic judgments.

Moments of conflict bring into bold reli
what is a perennial character of huma
history. In all of history we are constant
called upon to defend such justice as
have against flagrant forms of injustice. Y
every scheme of human justice is not on
a mere approximation of justice but i
variably contains elements of injustice. W
must contend for the truth against the li
but also recognise that the truth is not
us and that there is no human truth whi
is not tainted with the "ideological taint
that is, which is not coloured by intere
We must stand against a morality whi
makes the ambition of a single nation t
test of all values. We are forced at the sa
time to recognise that no nation is capab
of defending values which go beyond
interests unless those values coincide to so
extent with its vital needs.

This double perspective is of the ve
essence of Christianity. It is, on the o
hand, a religion of history. It takes hi
tory seriously. Unlike mystic religio
which regard all history as evil becau
it rests upon a basis of nature and finitud
Christianity believes that man, despite h
finiteness, has the possibility of serving t
will of God. But, on the other hand,
knows that this ideal possibility is co
rupted by sinful self-interest. Unlike mode
utopian religions, it sees no possibility
achieving pure disinterestedness in histo
Christianity is forced, by its recognition
the seriousness of sin as a persistent fa
of human history, to reject both the libe
utopia which believes that an adequa
education will make men completely i
partial, and the Marxist utopia, whi
attributes the pride and selfishness of m
to the class structure of society alone, a
which hopes for complete innocency on t
other side of the revolution, which is
destroy this class structure.

This double perspective of the Christi
faith demands, on the one hand, fatef
historic decisions; and, on the other han
the contrite knowledge that all historic de
sions remain ambiguous. We must co
tend for the highest truth, justice a
decency of which we are capable; and
may have to contend for them against
foe who means to destroy them. We mu

the same time recognise that there is no vil in the foe which is not, in some form, us also. This double perspective may be rmed "dialectical" in the modern sense that term. For it requires both a "Yes" nd a "No" upon every historic action. It equires, for example, in the present inance, the "Yes" of decision to defend emocracy against tyranny; and the "No" an indictment against every democracy hich pretends to be without fault.

Unfortunately, these two perspectives are lways being separated, and when one ands alone without the other it produces oral confusion.

If we allow the political and moral judgent by which we condemn a foe to stand lone we are betrayed to the devil of self-ghteousness. We condemn Nazi tyranny ithout remembering the elements of irresponsible power which corrupt every demoracy and without a contrite recognition f the sins of a dictated peace which drove e Germans to the madness of resentment ut of which Hitler's leadership emerged.

If, on the other hand, we think that the oral and religious judgment, which discovers us all to be sinners in the sight of od, means that we have no right to act gainst an acknowledged evil because we re not ourselves pure, we are delivered into istoric futility.

WO OPPOSITE ERRORS

We have had two types of religious perectionism in modern life, both of which ave contributed to the breakdown of our ivilisation. The so-called "Barthian" mphasis in modern Protestant thought, articularly popular on the Continent, has evived that element in Lutheran thought hich reduced relative moral and political istinctions to insignificance in comparison ith the fact that all men are sinners in e sight of God. It discouraged Christians om dealing responsibly with the "nicely alculated less and more," which is the very uff of historic justice and ordinary decency. is perhaps not too much to say that ermany finds herself in her present plight artly because the theology of the Lutheran eformation, which informed her religious fe, discouraged any great interest in the problem of justice. It simply took for granted that men are evil, and asserted that a strong state is required to hold their sins in check. It did not concern itself seriously with the problem how the sins of the strong state were to be checked.

But this type of religious thought has not been a serious danger in Anglo-Saxon countries. *In them the more prevalent type of religious perfectionism has rested upon the assumption that the Kingdom of God was a simple alternative to the relative choices which are the only choices that exist in politics.* It has had a wholesome sense of contrition, for instance, about the fact that the British Empire is not the Kingdom of God. But it also had the foolish notion that the British Empire could be made into the Kingdom of God, or that if it could not be, we had no right to defend it against Nazi aggression. It has been conscious of the inconsistencies of irresponsible power which exist in every democratic system, and has thought therefore that democracy should not be defended until it has purged itself of its evils. It has recognised that politics are a contest of power and that in such a contest forces are never engaged for the defence of ideal ends if immediate ends are not also served. It has imagined that it would be a simple thing to purge politics of this element of power and make it an exercise in pure moral suasion.

This form of Christian moralism imagines itself a purer type of Christianity than that held by those of us who are involved in the relativities of politics. As a matter of fact, its convictions are borrowed from the faith of the eighteenth century much more than from the Gospels. Its faith rests upon confidence in an inherent goodness of human nature, which is foreign to Christianity.

INVOLVEMENT IN EVIL

Genuine Christianity cannot be insensible to the tragedy of historical conflicts such as the one in which we are now engaged. Its sense of contrition must express itself ultimately not merely in repentance but in fruits meet for repentance. But meanwhile there is no reason why the church should meet the charge, that it has become apostate

from the gospel by its involvement in such a struggle, with shamefaced apologies. If it knows its gospel and sees the world in light of it, it knows that there are no such simple alternatives to involvement in evil as its critics suggest. Given the fact of sin, all justice in the realm of man's collective behaviour is achieved by securing some kind of decent equilibrium of power. But every such equilibrium stands under the peril of either tyranny or anarchy. Such a war as this one is merely the consequence of, and remedy for, the tyranny which results from irresponsible power. If it is declared that there can be nothing worse than war, the very simple answer is that tyranny is obviously worse. For when its exactions and vexations have become sufficiently intolerable, those who suffer from them rebel against the tyrannical power; and war is the consequence. Those who argue that tyranny can be destroyed by something less than war have still to prove that tyrants abdicate without being resisted. In the case of Germany they have made themselves so strong that internal resistance without external aid has long since proved itself to be inadequate.

If we are challenged to justify our participation in war, in terms of our Christian faith, our answer is quite simply that we do not regard Christianity as a religion which merely preaches the simple moral injunction that men ought to love one another. Rather is it a religion which illumines the tragic fact that though love is the law of life, no man completely lives by that law. To meet the reality of sin two things are necessary. We need immediate political remedies that we may achieve a tolerable justic despite the sin of man; and we also ne an ultimate mercy, the assurance of whi is really the "good news" of the gosp

POLITICAL JUSTICE

All this does not prove that every w is justified. But it is meant to justify t particular resistance to tyranny which Brita and France are now offering. Let those wh contend that this particular resistance is n justified because all war is unchristian sufficiently consistent to disavow all politic responsibilities. For once we embark up the task of achieving political justice we a in the field of a contest of power; and the is no particular point where we can disav our task. A responsible Christian statesma may not even be able to make public h scruples about war to the world; for to so is to give undue advantage to tyran who mock his scruples and take advanta of his sensitive conscience. It may yet proved that the greatest tragedy of t present war is that Nazi tyranny was allow to grow until it reached unparalleled propo tions, precisely because so many citizens a Christian civilisation were prevented these scruples from resisting the monst when there was yet time. If this shou prove to be true it would be "tragic" the narrow and exact sense of the wor It would reveal the possibility of evil eme ging from our highest good.

Yours very sincerely,

REINHOLD NIEBUHR.

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